



Whatcom County Criminal Justice Treatment Account Plan State Fiscal Year 2026-2027

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Overview

The Washington State Healthcare Authority (HCA) has allocated \$325,554 in Criminal Justice Treatment Account (CJTA) funds for the 2026-2027 State Fiscal Year to Whatcom County. These funds are intended to support local programs that address substance use disorders and improve treatment outcomes for individuals involved in the criminal legal system.

CJTA funding is governed by a structured planning process, outlined in statutory authority RCW 71.24.580, that must be followed by Whatcom County to ensure effective use of these funds. The planning process involves the County assessing local needs related to substance use disorders to identify gaps in services. This includes evaluating the local criminal legal system and existing treatment options. Based on the needs assessment, the County develops a comprehensive plan that outlines specific initiatives and strategies to address identified gaps in service and improve the continuum of care for individuals with substance use disorders. A local panel comprised of local stakeholders, in accordance with [RCW 71.24.580\(6\)](#), reviews the plan and provides recommendations regarding the allocation of CJTA funds in the community. The panel's goal is to ensure that the funds are directed toward filling the gaps left by evolving changes in the substance use disorder service system.

To address emerging needs and adjustments within the treatment services landscape, Whatcom County has the flexibility to move up to 10% of the funds between different categories of the plan within the allowed parameters of the HCA contract. This allows the County to adapt and ensure the funds are used in the most effective and responsive manner if minor adjustments are necessary during the biennium.

Background and History of the law for CJTA

In 2002, the Washington State Legislature enacted significant criminal justice reforms aimed at reducing prison sentences for non-violent drug offenses. The Legislature recognized that these reductions in prison populations would result in savings and sought to redirect those savings into more effective means of addressing substance use disorders (SUD) and preventing recidivism in the criminal justice system.

This effort was formalized through the establishment of the (CJTA), as outlined in [RCW 71.24.580](#). The primary goal of the CJTA was to provide funding for substance use disorder treatment and support services for individuals involved in the criminal legal system, particularly those at risk of reoffending due to untreated substance use issues. By focusing on treatment rather than incarceration, the Legislature aimed to improve outcomes for individuals, reduce long-term costs to the criminal legal system, and enhance public safety.

Over time, the law has evolved. In subsequent updates to the law, the Legislature expanded the scope of CJTA funding to include not only substance use disorder (SUD) treatment services but also recovery support services. Both SUD treatment services and recovery supports such as rental assistance are crucial for maintaining long-term recovery and preventing relapse. More recently, specialized funding was added to support Drug Court programs, which have since been renamed "Recovery Court" to better reflect their focus on rehabilitation and recovery from substance use disorders.



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Through these legislative updates, the CJTA has become an essential tool for addressing the intersection of substance use disorders and criminal legal involvement, with a focus on rehabilitation and reducing the cycle of recidivism.

The Whatcom County CJTA Panel is closely linked to the [Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force \(IPRTF\)](#), a local group that has been working since 2015 to divert individuals from incarceration and promote alternatives when appropriate. When incarceration occurs, the IPRTF emphasizes the importance of providing access to behavioral health services during jail transitions and for continued support within the community. This work aligns with the **Sequential Intercept Model (SIM)**, a national framework that identifies key points in the criminal legal system where individuals with behavioral health issues can be intercepted or diverted to receive appropriate care. The Whatcom County CJTA Panel continues to align its efforts with the cross-disciplinary recommendations of the IPRTF as it iteratively reviews the strategies and programs intended to address the behavioral health needs of criminally involved individuals in the community.

Summary of Expenditures & Panel Recommendations

The Whatcom County CJTA Panel was formed in 2018 and has convened during each biennium. The panel utilizes local data to assess and recommend services aimed at addressing gaps in the substance use disorder (SUD) continuum of care for individuals involved in the criminal legal system. The panel's recommendations have primarily focused on services for people with non-violent drug offenses, identifying key areas where funding could make the most significant impact. Key service areas recommended by the Panel include:

- Substance Use Disorder (SUD) assessments and care coordination to community treatment for individuals in jail and out-of-custody
- Residential treatment
- Rental assistance for eligible participants
- Recovery Court case management
- Medication for Opioid Use Disorders (MOUD) medications in the jail

Due to limited funding, the Panel has consistently prioritized services that directly support Recovery Court participants. In the last biennium, Whatcom County received \$651,108 in State CJTA funds, which were allocated across the identified service area needs listed above. Of this, \$300,719 was earmarked for specialized Recovery Court services, derived from a dedicated CJTA fund.

All local CJTA funds are planned to be fully expended by the end of the 2025-2026 cycle, adhering to the goals and priorities outlined in the CJTA Plan. This has been a consistent pattern for Whatcom County, as CJTA funds have historically been fully utilized by the end of each biennium. All CJTA-supported services in Whatcom County operate pursuant to [RCW 71.24.560](#) and in alignment with the CJTA requirements outlined in [RCW 71.24.580](#).

State Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Proposal & Rationale

The Whatcom County CJTA Panel convened multiple times during 2025 to determine local funding allocations based on historic and emerging patterns of utilization and expenditure data. The key service areas the panel identified in its prior recommendations remain unchanged, with intention to strategically support the full continuum of SUD service care for criminally-involved individuals.

On **February 18, 2026**, the panel discussed the current cycles utilization of the funding and felt that it was appropriately disrupted; deciding to maintain the current allocations for another year.

Evidence-Based and Innovative Practices

The [Washington State Institute for Public Policy \(WSIPP\)](#) recognizes Drug Courts as an evidence-based practice, based on the statistically significant reductions in crime and recidivism demonstrated through these programs. While Whatcom County

Recovery Court is not funded as a State Drug Court, it operates in alignment with this evidence-based model, and comprises the 30% carve-out in CJTA funding dedicated to innovative and best practices as documented in published research. CJTA funds are utilized to support the provision of services in Recovery Court that are not billable to Medicaid and other insurance, including case management, care coordination, and provision of groups for participants. CJTA funds serve as the payer of last resort for urinalysis testing for Recovery Court participants. Local Behavioral Health Sales Tax Funds comprise the bulk of the Whatcom County Recovery Court budget, and Whatcom County will demonstrate a match of CJTA funds in at least the amount allocated to Recovery Court on a dollar-for-dollar basis in quarterly revenue and expenditure reports.

[Coordination with Tribal Courts and Treatment Providers](#)

Recovery Court staff and other CJTA-funded community providers coordinate regularly with Tribal Courts and treatment providers in support of culturally relevant and appropriate supports for CJTA-eligible American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) individuals in Whatcom County. The Lummi Nation operates a Healing to Wellness Drug Court for tribal members whose cases fall under their jurisdiction. Tribal members whose cases are adjudicated in Whatcom County Recovery Court are referred to culturally-relevant Tribal treatment programs in alignment with their assessed ASAM level of care at all possible opportunities. Whatcom County Recovery Court regularly coordinates with Lummi C.A.R.E.S., Lummi Housing Authority, and Lummi Health Clinic, as well as other local tribal providers such as didg^wálic Wellness Center, a mobile MOUD Clinic available in Whatcom County thanks to a recently-established partnership between Swinomish Health Services and Whatcom County Health & Community Services.

[Jail-Based Services](#)

The Whatcom County Jail and its auxiliary Work Center are the only jail partners that utilize CJTA funding in support of eligible individuals in their custody. Whatcom County prioritizes utilization of CJTA dollars to facilitate rapid reentry into community-based treatment and less-restrictive safe recovery settings that are aligned with an individual's assessed level of ASAM care. As reflected in the attached Appendix A, Budget Overview and Narrative, CJTA funds are allocated to two categories of Jail-Based Services: Jail Medication-Assisted Treatment and SUD Assessments and Care Coordination.

[Medication for Opioid Use Disorder \(MOUD\)](#)

Pursuant to [RCW 71.24.580](#), recipients of CJTA funding (including Recovery Court) do not prohibit MOUD or require titration off of medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders. Broad-base recognition and support of this evidence-based practice exists across a wide array of intercepts on Whatcom County's SIM. CJTA funds comprise a small portion of total annual Jail MOUD services provided in the Whatcom County Jail. Continuity of care and uninterrupted access to MOUD is supported upon release to community with support from the Jail SUD Assessment and Care Coordination program, contracted through community-based provider Lifeline Connections.

[SUD Assessments and Care Coordination](#)

To accommodate the 30% limit on CJTA allocations to Jail-Based Services and in recognition of best practices, Lifeline Connections staff accept referrals for SUD Assessments in the jail and in the community for CJTA-eligible individuals. Community-based assessments are funded primarily by Medicaid and Insurance, and CJTA funds are reserved to support non-billable services and supports for care coordination and case management for criminally-involved individuals. Care coordination to community-based treatment comprises the vast majority of CJTA-funded services, as SUD providers arrange treatment bed dates and safe transportation in partnership with local prosecutors, public defenders, judges, and corrections through negotiated and agreed Temporary and Conditional Release Orders. CJTA funds are not utilized to provide individual SUD treatment or SUD treatment groups in the jail.

Residential Treatment & Insurance Coverage

In SFY2026, \$10,000 will be allocated to residential treatment as a cost-reimbursable fund for CJTA-eligible individuals facing a coverage gap or cost burden in relation to their recommended treatment. CJTA funds serve as a payer of last resort for residential treatment and other services that may be billable to Medicaid and other insurance. All residential treatment providers serving CJTA-eligible residents who can demonstrate a difference in the cost of treatment and available coverage are eligible to request CJTA funding to meet this gap. For example, Whatcom County's LIMRT is the only ASAM 3.1 level of care program in Washington State, and as a result is appropriately available to offenders statewide per RCW 71.24.580 (5)(b); they may wish to apply for this funding if there is a need.

This panel-recommended plan incorporates 100% allocation of monies toward treatment (defined in RCW 71.24.580 as "...services that are critical to a participant's successful completion of his or her substance use disorder treatment program"). The panel did not incorporate specific recommendations for allocations to treatment support (defined in RCW 71.24.580 as "...transportation to or from inpatient or outpatient treatment services ... and child care services").

Rental Assistance

Whatcom County faces significantly low rental vacancy rates and a demand for homeless and affordable housing that outpaces its availability on a consistent basis. Consequently the CJTA Panel prioritizes allocations to rental assistance in support of sustained community-based recovery for eligible participants. CJTA Rental Assistance is administered by the Opportunity Council, the community provider that oversees Whatcom County's Coordinated Entry System and a wide array of housing and support programs. Priority for rental assistance is given to Recovery Court and other Therapeutic Court participants, as well as other CJTA-eligible individuals. Recovery housing options presented to individuals include the local residences that fall under the authority of [RCW 41.05.760](#), however no single residence is required to be utilized. The availability of units and willingness of property managers to rent to criminally-involved individuals significantly impacts the amount of units participants may choose from; providers focus emphasis on housing choice at every opportunity within the limited scope of housing availability in the community.

Conclusion

A total of \$325,554 in state-appropriated CJTA funding was approved by the panel to be administered by the County for State Fiscal Year 2026-2027 in accordance with the allocations outlined in attached Appendix A: Budget Overview and Narrative. CJTA funding remains a vital component in supporting the full continuum of recovery care for criminally-involved individuals in Whatcom County.